Transcribing Walter Yonge's notes on proceedings in the House of Commons between 1642 and 1645

In the spring of 1967, Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper, then the Regius Professor of Modern History in the University of Oxford, wrote to me to ask if I would assist Dr Pearl in her work of this subject by transcribing the diaries. I agreed and duly spoke to her in the Manuscript Room of the British Museum. We agreed that I would transcribe all four volumes of Yonge's notes (in Additional Mss.18,777-18,780) and would be paid by the History Faculty £150 per volume. I duly transcribed the first of these volumes in 1967 and the remaining three by 1973. I was not her "assistant" in this task but undertook it myself. Nor was I her employee. I did not, moreover, keep copies of the first three volumes. In mid-1975, I read in *The Times Higher Education Supplement* that she was preparing the Yonge volumes for publication. But nothing happened.

By 1984, seventeen years after I had begun my transcriptions and eleven years after I had finished the last volume, I was puzzled by this failure to proceed and, having asked several academic friends if they thought her work was going to appear and having been told they thought it unlikely, I ordered from the British Museum and paid for photocopies of all four volumes to transcribe once again. Having completed a re-transcription of Additional Ms. 18,777, I informed her in writing that I intended to publish it. In return, I received a letter from her sent from New Hall, Cambridge claiming that I was not the author of this new transcript and had no right to publish it. I consulted a solicitor in Colchester and was advised that our 1967 agreement was a contract for services and that I was free to publish without legal constraint. This advice I passed to Dr Pearl and to the Oxford University Press which tried to put me under pressure on her behalf. Absolutely nothing transpired and I was able to proceed to publication.

Dr Pearl, however, had a second manoeuvre to try. She wrote to Gerald Aylmer, then President of the Royal Historical Society, claiming that I had illicitly denied Karen Kupperman access to the key to the de Witt system of shorthand used by William Jessop in his correspondence in the 1630s with the colonies in Bermuda and Providence Island. I had also allegedly failed to deposit copies of the transcripts made by Keith Perrin as I had been supposed to do in the Bodleian Library and the British

Museum. Fortunately, I had kept the relevant information. The key to the de Witt system of shorthand had been in print since the nineteenth century so I could hardly be accused of withholding it from Professor Kupperman. In fact, Keith Perrin had given me three copies of his transcript of the letters in British Museum Additional Ms.10,615 and his notes of the de Witt system. I was allowed by Dr Pearl to keep the bottom copy while she took the top two plus Perrin's notes to Oxford and handed them over to Hugh Trevor-Roper in the spring of 1968. It was his responsibility to deposit this material in the Bodleian and the BM. Why this had not happened by 1985 is not a question I can answer. But it had nothing whatsoever to do with me. Subsequently, he apparently did make the requisite deposits. When I explained the facts to Aylmer, the threat to derpive me of my newly-acquired Fellowship of the Royal Historical Society disappeared.

I fully appreciate that Dr Pearl did not like my return to working on the Yonge diaries. As late as 1998-99, she was indicating that she intended to publish an edition of all four volumes. Nothing came of these commitments. I believe that there is a good deal of critical material on me in her papers in the IHR. She had had every opportunity to publish her work if she wished but she never did. I am not able to respond to what may be in her files in the IHR but this is the truth about what happened.